From Equilateral to Right Angle: Triangular Relationships in Three Novels by Jane Austen

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In early nineteenth century England, women were considered private, subordinate, and weak creatures who needed men's protection. For them, marriage for financial security or social advancement was the only way to establish a stable position in society. However, among young girls, above all of the middle and upper classes, those whose intelligence gave them a sense of independence and individuality were often dissatisfied with the ordinary routine of marrige. In *Pride and Prejudice, Emma,* and *Persuasion*[1], Jane Austen portrays heroines in search of self-fulfillment. In their quest for individual happiness, they begin to question the meaning and value of marriage. For Austen's heroines, marriage must be a union of individuals and a place for self-expansion, where a woman of resolve can make the best use of her abilities.

The heroines in each of these three novels—Elizabeth Bennet in *Pride and Prejudice,* Emma Woodhouse in *Emma,* and Anne Elliot in *Persuasion*—have different conceptions of ideal love and marriage, but each faces a similar obstacle to the realization of her ideal. Immaturity of judgment causes each of these heroines to form a triangular relationship with two marriage candidates. Jean Kennard[2] describes Austen's convention of using two suitors as follows:

> She [Austen] used two of them [characters from the novel of sensibility] in particular, the unscrupulous or "wrong" suitor and the exemplary or "right" suitor, as touchstone of value in her heroine's progress towards maturity. (11)

Through the heroine's relationships to the right and wrong suitor, she,

as the apex of the triangle, becomes conscious of the gap between her imaginative world and the greater world of reality. Austen endows each of her heroines with exceptional talents that prepare her development toward a successful marriage. The heroine's intelligence, spiritual strength, and self-control are critical faculties that guide her progress toward self-realization. It is this process of self-realization that allows each heroine—Elizabeth, Emma, and Anne—to identify the right suitor, the one with whom she can achieve her ideal of individual happiness.

The triangular relationship frames a distinctive pattern for the heroine's movement toward her successful marriage with the right suitor. The heroine's movement is self-directed; she acts according to decisions based on her own observations. She misunderstands the right suitor's behavior and develops a strong antipathy or prejudice toward him. Through a similar misunderstanding, the heroine becomes well disposed to the wrong suitor, a man whose charms are the opposite of the right suitor's. The wrong suitor's attractiveness temporarily allures the heroine. She mistakenly thinks that the intentions of both are honorable. However, her strong moral consciousness and discernment stop her from being swallowed up in the momentary charm of the wrong suitor, whose betrayal of the heroine Austen gradually reveals. As soon as the heroine recongnizes that her judgment of the wrong suitor has been faulty, she begins to move in the opposite direction, toward the right suitor. She realizes that her misunderstanding of the right suitor has been a groundless prejudice, and rejects her previous evaluation of the wrong suitor. She turns herself around and goes to the right suitor in reconsideration of his value in a new light.

The heroine's self-awareness is the most improtant factor inducing her to resolve her triangle and achieve a successful marriage. Austen uses an identical tripartite plot device to set up the triangles in each of the three novels under consideration. She gives the heroine and the right suitor the *time* and the *opportunity* to think objectively, and the *motive* for the heroine to be convinced by the right suitor's proposal.

Austen provides a long incubation period for the relationship of

heroine and right suitor, allowing her to progress toward a proper understanding of him. In *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth meets the right suitor, Darcy, in the beginning of the story. The long term of Elizabeth's misunderstanding of Darcy, particularly her antagonism toward his seemingly haughty attitudes, is indispensable to prepare a gradual movement toward unity. In both *Emma* and *Persuasion,* the heroine's relationship with the right suitor is already established at the outset. In *Emma,* Mr. Knightley is a brother-in-law and an old, friend, "one of the few people who could see faults in Emma Woodhouse, and the only one who ever told her of them" (8). In *Persuasion,* Wentworth is a lover with whom Anne has broken before the story begins. These novels begin after the establishment of their long relationships and conclude with the mutual reestablishment of esteem between the heroine and her right suitor. Austen typically sets up her heroine's characteristic development by providing her with an unrecognized but appropriate suitor and tracing their relationship over a long period of *time.*

When the heroine realizes that the original evaluations of her two suitors are inaccurate, she recognizes this as a failure of her judgment; necessity drives her to reverse direction and overcome her prejudice against the right suitor. At this turning point Austen creates a special character who gives the heroine the *opportunity* to reconsider her misjudgments. In *Persuasion* Mrs. Smith Anne's "old schoolfellow" who showed kindness when Anne's mother died (362), tells Anne of the cruelty she and her husband suffered at the hands of Mr. Elliot. In *Emma* Mr. Knightley expresses his doubts about Frank Churchill's behavior in the early chapters[3], but it is Mrs. Weston, Emma's former governess, who discloses Frank's secret engagement with Jane Fairfax. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen reveals the treachery of the wrong suitor, Wickham, and causes Elizabeth's reevaluation of Darcy, by a gradual revelation of facts. However, Mrs. Reynolds, the faithful housekeeper, plays an important role in the gradual shift of value from Wickham to Darcy. Her reliable opinion helps Elizabeth to reverse her judgments of the two suitors. Of Wickham, Mrs. Reynolds says "I'm afraid he has turned out very wild" (228); in contrast, she

calls Darcy "the sweetest-tempered, most generous-hearted" (230). In *Pride and Prejudice* and *Persuasion* Austen creates special characters who can tell the heroine about the evils of the wrong suitor, and even in *Emma* Mrs. Weston seems to be prepared for this role from the beginning of the story. These characters serve as skillful narrative expedients that allow Austen to develop her heroines' self-awareness.

The third plot device, the *motive,* is the advantageous social and financial position of the right suitor. In *Persuasion* and in *Pride and Prejudice,* the heroines' families have a problem of inheritance since they have only daughters. The absence of male heirs causes the family property to go to a more distant male relative.[4] Mr. Bennet's property goes to Elizabeth's cousin, Mr. Collins; the property of Anne's father, Sir Walter Elliot, goes to Anne's cousin, Mr. Elliot. Under these circumstances, the heroine has no choice but to seek financial security in marriage. Elizabeth and Anne lack dowries sufficient to establish a stable position, so their marriages must provide financial security. The financial and social status of the right suitors solves both these heroines' problems. Darcy's wealth even rescues Elizabeth's youngest sister, Lydia, from poverty following her elopement with Wickham. The objections which had hindered Anne's relationship with Captain Wentworth disappear when smooth promotion in the military improves his financial position.

The situation in *Emma* is somewhat different, because Emma and her elder sister Isabella seem to be in a position to inherit their father's property.[5] Nevertheless, financial considerations play a part in the designation of Emma's "right suitor." The marriage of Emma to her brother-in-law Mr. Knightley further unites the property of the Woodhouse and Knightley families. Austen thus creates "right suitors" whose attractiveness includes financial and social advantage in order to increase the heroines' awareness of reality.

Though all Austen's heroines have exceptional abilities which help them achieve self-realization, Elizabeth, Emma, and Anne have totally different ways of approaching it. Austen's objective description of each heroine's individuality provides the basis for her misjudgments about the right and wrong suitor; it also reveals the different ways

each develops within the triangular relationship.

Both Elizabeth and Emma are inexperienced and premature in their judgments of others. Because they are self-satisfied, they tend to judge people critically, and to base their criticism on first impressions. However, in *Emma* Austen turns the usual image of her heroine's character inside out. Emma's aristocratic arrogance and whimsicality (in addition to her habit of matchmaking, which she considers her best contribution to the community) make the reader dislike the heroine's character. Austen discloses these traits in Emma's character as central issues of the story on the opening page of *Emma*:

> The real evils indeed of Emma's situation were the power of having rather too much her own way, and a disposition to think a little too well of herself; these were the disadvantages which threatened alloy to her many enjoyments. The danger, however, was at present so unperceived, that they did not by any means rank as misfortunes with her. (4)

Austen shows Emma's character traits to be the product of her fortunate situation, and describes her overconfidence in her beauty, cleverness, and wealth. This setting of the heroine in bright circumstances is never seen in *Pride and Prejudice* or *Persuasion*. Though Elizabeth and Anne are protected within the small society of the middle and upper classes, both heroines are given abilities of observation instead of beauty for the purpose of distinguishing their personalities from the unusual perfection of their elder sisters.[6]

In contrast, Austen surrounds Emma with the most fortunate of circumstances to lay the foundation for her mistakes. The first of these results from her blind overconfidence. Emma's attempt at matchmaking between Harriet and Elton causes her great humiliation and makes her miserable; Elton, a vicar of Highbury, sets a higher value on himself and has designs on Emma. Emma then sets her eyes on Frank Churchill. She matches him with Harriet to make up for her first mistake, and decides to remain single herself. Frank's postponements of his arrival only fire her imagination as she organizes her plan, yet Emma knows that she herself is the only single woman in the vicinity who is really a match for Frank socially. His attitude and

appearance are pleasing to her, and their relationship is one that satisfies Emma's vanity. In fact, Frank's charming behavior temporarily attracts her to him. However, Emma's strong resolution not to marry and her determination to match Frank with Harriet allow her to control herself. Emma's faulty judgment prevents her from seeing Frank clearly; his hidden intention is to marry Jane Fairfax. Emma is convinced that he will propose to her, and even prepares her rejection and recommendation of Harriet to him. Henrietta Harmsel[7] points to the irony in Emma's belief that Frank loves her as indicative of the gap between reality and Emma's imagination (145–46). Emma imagines that Frank loves her and that Harriet loves Frank; in reality, Frank loves Jane rather than Emma, and Harriet does not love Frank at all.

Austen places Emma in a position to learn from her mistakes that she really cannot stand by herself. Emma understands that she desperately needs someone like Mr. Knightley who is able to guide her judgment. This is Emma's self-realization. Through her respect for Mr. Knightley she loses her egocentrism and develops into a mature woman. She is satisfied with "Mr. Knightley's high superiority of character" in comparison to Frank (*Emma* 437). Her new level of maturity is evident in this declaration to Frank:

> If not in our dispositions ··· there is a likeness in our destiny; the destiny which bids fair to connect us with two characters so much superior to our own. (435)

This statement indicates Emma's realization that individuals must be properly matched. She can now accept the relationship of Frank and Jane—or, for that matter, of Harriet and Robert Martin—just as she accepts her own relationship with Mr. Knightley. Austen presents this new, mature perspective as Emma's own approach to the ideal of individual happiness.

In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen sets up her heroine's development with the same device she used in *Emma*: Elizabeth's misjudgment psychologically drives her into a corner. Elizabeth's prejudice against Darcy's aristocratic attitude and her misjudgment of Wickham, based on superficial qualities, put her in a despairing position. Both Emma

and Elizabeth are immature in their critical dispositions. The difference between them is that Emma's attraction to the wrong suitor (Frank Churchill) blinds her to the right one (Mr. Knightley), whereas Elizabeth's hatred for the right suitor (Darcy) pushes her toward the wrong one (Wickham). Elizabeth believes that Darcy is interfering with Bingley's love for her older sister Jane, just as she believes that Wickham is another victim of Darcy's aristocratic ego; however, the truth is just the opposite. Such are the situational ironies that develop from the triangular relationship in *Pride and Prejudice*.

Elizabeth has a definite ideal of love and marriage, which Austen reveals in Elizabeth's opposition to the marriage of Mr. Collins and Charlotte Lucas, her closest friend. Elizabeth says to her sister:

> My dear Jane, Mr. Collins is a conceited, pompous, narrowminded silly man; you know he is, as well as I do: and you must feel, as well as I do, that the woman who marries him cannot have a proper way of thinking. You shall not defend her, though it is Charlotte Lucas. You shall not, for the sake of one individual, change the meaning of principle and integrity, nor endeavor to persuade yourself or me, that selfishness is prudence, and insensibility of danger security for happiness. (128–29)

Elizabeth's objective and logical way of thinking increases her antagonism toward the haughty and aristocratic Darcy, while she is attracted by Wickham's "happy readiness of conversation" (67), his good humor, and his pleasant manners. But she never succumbs completely to his charm, because she is not entirely certain of his competence.[8]

Austen improves Elizabeth's judgment and helps her to avoid further mistakes by having her heroine travel outside of Longbourn. In this way Elizabeth can observe and see more objectively Charlotte's accommodation with Mr. Collins, which in turn expands her knowledge of real life. She also becomes aware, gradually, that Wickham has not been truthful. The values of Darcy and Wickham in her own mind shift accordingly. Her meetings with Darcy while she is travelling, and the letter she receives from him, allow Elizabeth to realize that her antagonism toward Darcy is nothing but her own narrowmindedness. Elizabeth sees that Darcy has swallowed his pride and

behaved unselfishly for her sake,[9] which increases her respect for him. Nevertheless, in her own mind there is still considerable distance between them. She cannot forget his haughty proposal to her, which caused her to reject him indignantly.

Austen's problem, at this point in the story, is how to decrease the emotional gap between Elizabeth and Darcy. How can Elizabeth accept Darcy's generosity under the circumstances just described? Austen advances her heroine's self-realization, and overcomes this problem, by introducing Lady Catherine de Bourgh's high-handed opposition to the relationship of Darcy and Elizabeth. Although Darcy has not yet proposed to Elizabeth, Lady Catherine intervenes by explaining to her why such a match is impossible:

> Because honor, decorum, prudence—nay, interest, forbid it. Yes Miss Bennet, interest; for do not expect to be noticed by his [Darcy's] family or friends if you willfully act against the inclination of all ··· My daughter and my nephew [Darcy] are formed for each other. They are descended, on the maternal side, from the same noble line; on the fathers', from respectable, honorable, and ancient, though untitled families. Their fortune on both sides is splendid. They are destined for each other by the voice of every member of their respective houses; and what is to divide them? The upstart pretensions of a young woman without family, connections, or fortune. (332–3)

Elizabeth objects strongly to Lady Catherine's concept of marriage as the joining of two houses. She also realizes that Darcy's ideas agree with hers, that he despises the vanity of aristocracy and their attachment to forms. This is another step in Elizabeth's progress toward maturity. Reuben Brower[10] describes Elizabeth's objective reconsideration of her feelings for Darcy as a "judicial process" (82), which he traces step by step:

> In this beautifully graded progress of feeling, from "hatred" or any "dislike" to "respect" to "esteem" to "gratitude" and "a real interest" in Darcy's "welfare," each sentiment is defined with an exactness that is perfectly appropriate to Elizabeth's habit of mind as presented earlier in the novel. She defines her sentiments

as exactly as her moral judgments. (83)

Austen's achievement is in depicting the psychological movement of Elizabeth's progress toward maturity within the framework of her character and habits of mind, established from the beginning of the novel. Elizabeth's self-realization becomes possible once she can see in herself the faults she had previously criticized in others.

Anne, the heroine of *Persuasion*, like Elizabeth, has a strong objection to aristocratic vanity. Despite the fact that Anne's father, Sir Walter Elliot, is "distressed for money" and by "the heavy bills of his tradespeople" (233), he never gives up his vanity. Anne's powers of observation allow her to see her father for what he is: a fallen aristocrat.

Anne is completely virtuous, patient, and already has a mature point of view; she is almost the opposite of Emma. As Alistair Duckworth[11] points out, Anne's "predicament is closer to that of Jane Fairfax" (178) in *Emma*. Like Jane Fairfax, who suffers from her doubts about Frank Churchill's love, Anne is afflicted by Wentworth's cold attitude when they meet again. Anne endures patiently Wentworth's whimsical contact with Henrietta and Louisa Musgrove, sisters-in-law of Anne's younger sister Mary; her discerning nature allows her to see Wentworth clearly. Anne "could not but think, as far as she might dare to judge from memory and experience, that Captain Wentworth was not in love with either" (*Persuasion* 298).

Anne's character develops less dramatically than those of Emma and Elizabeth, because her ability to judge others has already reached the stage of maturity. She patiently waits for Wentworth to grow toward her. There is, however, one problem with Anne's character: her passivity. Though she is discerning enough to see through the designs of her cousin William Elliot, she is unable to tell others—in particular her godmother, Lady Russell—of her observations. The young Mr. Elliot's attentions to Anne please Lady Russell and Anne's father, for he is heir to the family fortune. For all these reasons, Anne cannot treat him coldly. This passiveness allows Mr. Elliot to manipulate her, which causes Wentworth to waver in his affection for Anne. It is through this triangular relationship that Anne realizes her ideal

man is not someone like Mr. Elliot:

> She prized the frank, the open-hearted, the eager character beyond all others. Warmth and enthusiasm did captivate her still. She felt that she could so much more depend upon the sincerity of those who sometimes looked or said a careless or a hasty thing, than of those whose presence of mind never varied, whose tongue never slipped. (370–71)

By comparing Wentworth to Mr. Elliot, Anne recognizes the true meaning of these sentiments. With this as a turning point, the affection between Anne and Wentworth is reestablished.

From the beginning of *Persuasion* Anne is mature enough to see others objectively. Her development in the course of the novel is toward self-confidence and an ability to see herself as clearly as she sees others. Anne's new ability to analyze her own feelings objectively induces a sentimental self-realization. As Harmsel points out, Anne is "in some respects the typical heroine of eighteenth century romance—sensitive, morally irreproachable, passive, and ever constant in love" (165). For Austen, however, Anne is a new type of heroine, more praiseworthy than either Emma Woodhouse or Elizabeth Bennet.[12]Even so, it is through the standard device of a love triangle that Austen develops her.

In each of the three novels, Austen creates a wrong suitor to stimulate the heroine's development. These wrong suitors have certain qualities in common, as Jean Kennard points out:

> The vices of the wrong suitor are similar in each novel: greed and selfishness, which are associated with violating society's code and frequently with charm. (44)

The wrong suitor is always suited to the company of women and has an attractiveness which arouses the heroine's interest, but he always has his own purposes for being interested in the heroine. The heroine's morality causes her to judge him as a wicked character once his ulterior motives are exposed.

There is an interesting correlation between the characters of the wrong suitors and the heroines. The more blameless the heroine is, the more vicious the wrong suitor who approaches her. Anne, the

most ideal of Austen's heroines, is approached by the most vicious wrong suitor, Mr. Elliot. Emma, the most flawed of Austen's heroines, is approached by the least vicious wrong suitor, Frank Churchill—a man worthy to marry Jane Fairfax. Similarly, Wickham, though more vicious than Frank Churchill, marries Elizabeth's younger sister Lydia. The degree of the wrong suitor's viciousness can be measured in two ways: how bad his past behavior is, and the nature of his ulterior motive in approaching the heroine.

Mr. Elliot in *Persuasion* and Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* try to become intimate with Anne and Elizabeth by hiding some sort of disgraceful past. Both are strangers who contrive to establish a good reputation for themselves in the heroines' small communities. Both are afraid that disclosure of their secret pasts will spoil their designs on the heroines. In *Persuasion* Austen had to create a most skillful and calculating character, Mr. Elliot, in order to deceive the mature and discerning Anne. Though Mr. Elliot has a "very awkward history" (34) in his relationship with Sir Walter Elliot and family, his cleverly calculated behavior succeeds in reestablishing his position with them. He convinces everyone with his expressions of regret for neglecting them in the past, and with his show of trust worthy of an heir presumptive.

Austen skillfully reveals Mr. Elliot's deceitful nature through the accidental meeting of Anne and Mrs. Smith. Anne is astonished by Mrs. Smith's description of his character:

> Mr. Elliot is a man without heart or conscience; a designing, wary, cold-blooded being, who thinks only of himself; who, for his own interest or ease, would be guilty of any cruelty, or any treachery, that could be perpetrated without risk of his general character. He has no feeling for others. Those whom he has been the chief cause of leading into ruin, he can neglect and desert without the least compunction. He is totally beyond the reach of any sentiment of justice or compassion. Oh! he is black at heart; hollow and black! (405)

Mrs. Smith's exposure of Mr. Elliot's character deals his reestablishment a blow, and relieves Anne of her feelings of obligation toward

him. When she understands the true intentions behind his frequent visits, his interest in her, and his cautions to Sir Walter against remarriage with Mrs. Clay, Anne does not hesitate to exclude Mr. Elliot from her mind. Moreover, she is encouraged to recognize her own deep affection for Wentworth.

Compared to Mr. Elliot, Wickham in *Pride and Prejudice* has weak and immature qualities in his character. However, like Mr. Elliot, Wickham has a disgraceful past, which is revealed by Darcy. Darcy's letter, in which he tries to show his innocence and to overcome Elizabeth's strong prejudice, tells her of Wickham's treacherous past and slothful disposition.[13] Wickham's background reveals his inability to adapt himself to real society and his shameless weakness of nature.

Wickham's true intention in approaching Elizabeth is not clear. If his goal is money, as his calculated contact with Miss King indicates, why does he elope with Lydia, Elizabeth's youngest sister? Austen depicts this wrong suitor as weak, fickle, and irrational. Harmsel describes Wickham's character in terms of his functions:

> His [Wickham's] role ··· functions in various ways to advance the plot, enrich the characterizations, and multiply the ironies of the whole novel. (80)

As a wrong suitor, Wickham is more active than Mr. Elliot: his willful misinterpretation of Darcy increases Elizabeth's hatred of the young aristocrat; his manipulation of Miss King and his elopement with Lydia show Elizabeth the failures of her judgment. Wickham's selfish behavior alters the situations of Elizabeth and Darcy, and drives Elizabeth into a tight corner in the triangular relationship. Without really intending to do so, Wickham puts Elizabeth into a desperate situation through his weak and fickle behavior.

Wickham is not a complete villain because he is stupid enough to be fettered by Lydia's affection and to elope with her, the most frivolous of the Bennet daughters. Austen creates Wickham as the perfect wrong suitor; placed directly between Elizabeth and Darcy, he controls the triangle they form.

The least villainous of Austen's wrong suitors is Frank Churchill, who has no disgraceful past and whose motivation for manipulating

the heroine, Emma, is comparatively innocent. Frank's only motive in becoming close to Emma is to conceal his engagement to Jane Fairfax, and he need not be greedy because the amount of Mrs. Churchill's property assures him of a promising future. However, Frank has the same kind of weakness, the same habit of depending on others, and the same lack of seriousness as Wickham. Though Mr. Knightley is the only one in the novel who can discern these qualities in Frank, Frank's first act—the postponement of his arrival in Highbury—shows the reader that Frank cares more for Mrs. Churchill's fortune than for his own father. Frank's arrival, timed to coincide with that of his secret fiancee, Jane Fairfax, further shows his selfishness and insincerity toward his father, Mr. Weston. Beatrice Marie[14] calls Frank's behavior the "egotistical pursuit of self-interest" (11). In a less harsh evaluation, Jean Kennard points out that Frank has no intention of seducing Emma. Because he lacks the greediness of *Persuasion*'s William Elliot, Kennard says Frank's character bears "only superficial resemblances" to the wrong suitors of Austen's other novels (36).

Frank's lack of seriousness is evident in the interest he shows toward Emma while hiding his engagement to Jane Fairfax. As Alistair Duckworth points out, Frank "sees life as a game" and comes to play a "double game" with Emma and Jane (167, 169). The way Frank plays this "double game" shows why he is the wrong suitor in this novel. Like Wickham, Frank is quite afraid of hurting his reputation, so he does not actually betray either Emma or Jane; but his weakness prevents him from making clear choices and acting responsibly. It satisfies his vanity to appear worthy in Emma's eyes, and he enjoys deceiving the public. This self-indulgence leads him to violate society's rules and in the end, it also causes Mr. Knightley to become aware of his love for Emma. These qualities in Frank's character are precisely those that Kennard lists as typical of the wrong suitor in Austen's novels:

> The wrong suitor, although often having the appearance of virtue ··· is merely superficially charming. He is invariably weak and this weakness takes the form of self-indulgence, of breaking the

social code. (23)

Though Kennard's definition does not quite apply to Mr. Elliot—he is a complete villain—it fits Frank quite well and Wickham perfectly. It is a testament to Austen's skill as a novelist that she individualizes each wrong suitor to fit her heroine. Each of Austen's heroines has her own limitations and weaknesses, making her susceptible to the charms of a certain kind of man. By creating wrong suitors who make use of those limitations and weaknesses, Austen can lead her heroines, through their own misjudgments, to maturity and self-realization.

Austen also considers the balance of individual qualities when creating the right suitors for her heroines. The more faults a heroine has, the less mature she is, the more mature her right suitor must be. For example, Mr. Knightley, the right suitor for Emma, is the most capable and mature in his judgment. Wentworth, on the other hand, is the least mature right suitor, because Anne is a capable and mature person from the beginning. The heroine's relationship with the right suitor, however, is not as static as the simple balance of qualities between herself and the wrong suitor. The right suitor, like the heroine herself, must undergo his own individual development to make possible their harmonious union.

Among the three right suitors (Mr. Knightley, Darcy, and Wentworth), Wentworth undergoes the most marked development in order to match the level of Anne's maturity. The pattern of his development resembles the process of Emma and Elizabeth's self-realization: overcoming mistakes, misjudgments, and prejudice. Wentworth mistakenly becomes involved with Louisa because of his disappointments in his past relationship with Anne, but he still does not consider Louisa his ideal type for marriage. Austen puts him offstage, on a visit to his brother, to give him time to reflect. His recognition of Anne's worth improves, but he continues to suffer because of his misjudgment of Anne's relationship to Mr. Elliot. Anne's comment that men easily forget love, while women remain constant (437) helps Wentworth realize that he has been weak and immature. He realizes that their misunderstandings have resulted from his bitter feelings about the past. Wentworth's development into a mature man enables

him to reestablish his relationship with Anne.

In the relationship of Anne and Wentworth it is mostly Wentworth who develops; Anne patiently waits while he becomes mature, generous and respectable. However, in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma*, Darcy and Mr. Knightley do not develop as much as Wentworth. Both are respected adults from the beginning; their development is actually a change of viewpoint. In his relationship with Elizabeth, Darcy gradually moves toward Elizabeth's natural virtue because of his respect for her free and active intelligence. Kennard explains Darcy's movement toward resolution in a successful marriage with Elizabeth:

> He moves from total concern with social form, with "art," to an acceptance of benevolence, of "Nature," just as surely as Elizabeth moves in the opposite direction. (31)

Darcy's efforts to approach Elizabeth's nature (a refreshingly different nature and intelligence to him) begin when he writes her a confessional letter, vindicating his actions without exaggerating or giving up his pride. He actually humbles himself by making financial arrangements for the marriage of Wickham and Lydia. He ignores Lady Catherine's objections and strives for a good relationship between Elizabeth and his sister Georgiana. These effortt show Darcy's growing tolerance and generosity, traits that he must have as the head of an aristocratic house-hold. In the middle ground between "art" and "nature," Darcy finds perfect harmony with Elizabeth.

Mr. Knightley's motivation for change is different from that of the other right suitors. It comes from his realization that Emma needs to be given exemplary behavior rather than verbal admonitions about her unfeeling arrogance toward others. His kindness to Jane's family and his compassionate behavior toward Harriet make Emma realize that her own kindness has been superficial. Thus Mr. Knightley succeeds in teaching Emma by example. Early in the novel (vol. 1, ch. 5, pp. 31–2) Austen suggests that Mr. Knightley's affection for Emma is like that of an older brother (she is seventeen years younger than he is). As he advises Emma of her misjudgments of Elton and then Frank, he gradually recognizes his own strong love for her. Finally he cannot stand Frank's cunning behavior any longer, and he sees a

necessity to protect Emma from the danger of Frank's "double game." Mr. Knightley's new self-awareness affects Emma's process of maturing. As the only person who understands Emma, he allows her natural abilities to develop. By his self-realization and his efforts on the heroine's behalf, Mr. Knightley, like Darcy, becomes a more mature and generous figure. This is one of the typical developments Austen creates for the right suitor.

The right suitor's characteristics in the three novels under discussion are that he always has correct judgment and social experience. In addition he is generous, honest and wealthy, qualities which are almost the opposite of the wrong suitor's. Besides these general qualities of the right suitor, there is a matching of the right suitor's individuality with the heroine's. The opposing natures of the right suitor and the heroine result in a mutual fitness. Emma is concerned only with her own private world, which is governed by her unrealistic fantasies. She needs Mr. Knightley's open manner and manly sense of responsibility for balance. His maturity and steadiness, greater than those of the other right suitors, are necessary to overcome the faults which Emma's exceptional fortune have given her. In *Pride and Prejudice* Darcy's flexible moral judgment softens Elizabeth's overly logical mind; on the other hand, Darcy needs Elizabeth's free and active natural intelligence to free him from the constraints of his aristocratic formality. In *Persuasion* Wentworth's active and gentle sensibility perfectly fit Anne's innocent, passive and self-possessed virtue. Through these correspondences between the characterization of right suitor and heroine, Austen is able to preserve naturally the original and rare abilities which she esteems in her heroines. Thus, Austen's individual tailoring of the right suitor is a successful technique that makes the heroine more appealing.

The triangular relationship Austen presents in these three novels is not the kind associated with modern romance fiction, because the right and wrong suitor never exist together in the heroine's mind. Austen creates the wrong suitor only as motivation for the heroine to develop her character, and prepares the right suitor to aid the heroine's self-realization. The wrong suitor provides stimulation; on

the other hand, the right suitor provides guidance to a just perception of reality, thus allowing the heroine to mature. The heroine's progress toward maturity and self-realization is rather straightforward, with few complications from reality. To be sure, Austen endows all her heroines with rare and exceptional talents that we admire. But it is her careful preparation of the wrong suitor's partial role and the right suitor's total role that ultimately gives the heroine control of her life.

Through each triangular relationship, Austen takes all possible steps to avoid her heroine's irrevocable involvement with the irresponsibility of the wrong suitor. She uses the form of the triangular relationship to lead her heroines to maturity and an adaptation to the real circumstances of their lives. As a result, they develop a sense of independence and individuality in love and marriage. Marriage, instead of diminishing Austen's heroines, provides them with a place where their abilities can develop. In the context of early nineteenth century English society—Austen's own society—these heroines are a privileged few who have the strength to direct their lives toward an ideal marriage.

NOTES

1 The following editions will be cited:
Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (New York: Harper, 1950).
....., *Emma*, ed. J. Kinsley (London: Oxford UP, 1970).
....., *Northanger Abbey and Persuasion*, ed. J. Kinsley, (London: Oxford UP, 1971).

2 Jean E. Kennard, *Victims of Convention* (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1978). I regard the heroine of novel as the apex of a triangle and place her rival suitors at either side of the triangle's base. Typically, one of these suitors is "wrong" for the heroine, while the other one is "right." I follow Jean Kennard's lead in defining the characteristics of right and wrong suitors.

3 Mr. Knightley's criticism of Frank Churchill is in vol. 1, ch. 18 and vol. 2, ch. 7. But in vol. 3, ch. 5, Mr. Knightley, in order to warn Emma, tells her of his suspicions of Frank's double-dealing.

4 According to Harold Potter, "... the notions of primogeniture in males survived" until 1938, the year in which was established "the right of the widow and children to a share in the deceased's property." (*Outlines of English Legal History*, 5th ed. [London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1958], pp. 241–2).

5 Perhaps this is because Isabella's eldest son, the nearest male relative, continues to be in a direct line of inheritance.

6 Elizabeth's sister, Jane, has virtuous beauty; Anne's sister, Elizabeth Elliot, has perfect beauty.

7 Henrietta T. Harmsel, *Jane Austen: A Study in Fictional Conventions* (London: The Hague; Paris: Mouton & Co., 1964).

8 John Hardy explains that "Wickham's 'charm' is at first enough to flatter Elizabeth, but it is not substantial enough to engage and hold her attention. She comes to hear him speak with a very different idea of what his abilities are" (*Jane Austen's Heroines: Intimacy in Human Relationships* [London: Routledge, 1984], p. 44).

9 In spite of Darcy's hatred of Wickham, he generously gives financial assistance to Elizabeth's sister Lydia and Wickham when they elope, and also arranges their marriage (ch. 52).

10 Reuben A. Brower, "Light and Bright and Sparkling: Irony and Fiction in *Pride and Prejudice*," in *Discussions of Jane Austen*, ed. William Webster Heath (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1961).

11 Alistair M. Duckworth, *The Improvement of the Estate: A Study of Jane Austen's Novels* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1971).

12 On the other hand, "Jane Austen regarded Elizabeth Bennet as her favourite among all her heroines" (*Oxford Companion to English Literature*, 5th ed., p. 787).

13 Darcy's letter explains that, out of desire for freedom and money, Wickham betrayed the will of Darcy's father; and that when Wickham realized Darcy did not intend to give him more money, he tried to elope with Darcy's sister Georgiana (ch. 35).

14 Beatrice Marie, "*Emma* and the Democracy of Desire," in *Studies in the Novel* 17.1 (1985).